DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 612 RC 019 582

AUTHOR Minner, Sam; Prater, Greg
TITLE Preparing Special Educators for Work in Rural Areas: Two Field-Based Programs That Work.
PUB DATE Mar 94
NOTE 8p.; In: Montgomery, Diane, Ed. Rural Partnerships: Working Together. Proceedings of the Annual National Conference of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (14th, Austin, Texas, March 23-26, 1994); see RC 019 557.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Education; American Indian Reservations; Anglo Americans; *College School Cooperation; *Cross Cultural Training; Elementary Secondary Education; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; Hispanic Americans; *Navajo (Nation); Preservice Teacher Education; Rural Education; Special Education; *Special Education Teachers; Teacher Shortage
IDENTIFIERS Native Americans; Northern Arizona University

ABSTRACT

In response to a problem in recruiting and retaining special education teachers on the Navajo Reservation, the Rural Special Education Project (RSEP) was designed to prepare special education teachers to deliver quality services to Navajo children with handicapping conditions. The RSEP is a partnership between Northern Arizona University and the Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD) in Kayenta, Arizona. The 18 students selected for the RSEP for the 1992-1993 academic year included 9 Navajo, 1 Hopi, and 8 Anglo students. All Native American participants were employed by KUSD as teacher aides. Anglo students resided in apartments owned by KUSD for the entire school year. Each morning, Anglo participants worked four hours in regular classrooms that employed a full-inclusion model, while Native American participants worked at their teacher aide jobs. All RSEP participants attended teacher preparation classes in the afternoon. Topics discussed were related to the students' experiences in the classroom. A cross-cultural counselor met with students monthly to discuss personal and professional stresses. Navajo participants hosted non-Navajo participants in social and cultural events. The Rural Multicultural Training Collaborative, begun in 1993, is similar to the RSEP but also includes Hispanic participants and Spanish immersion in Mexico for Anglo participants. (KS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Diane Montgomery
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Sam Minner, Ph.D.
Center for Excellence in Education
Northern Arizona University
Flagstaff, Arizona
86001

Greg Prater, Ph.D.
Northern Arizona University
Flagstaff, Arizona
86001

ED 369 612

PREPARING SPECIAL EDUCATORS FOR WORK IN RURAL AREAS: TWO FIELD-BASED PROGRAMS THAT WORK

The need for programs designed to prepare special education teachers for service in rural and remote areas is great. This need was first brought to the attention of the educational establishment by Helge (1984). She described the many obstacles inhibiting teachers trained in urban areas from delivering high quality services to children residing in rural locations and called for the development of programs specifically designed to prepare educators for rural work. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services responded to this need by sponsoring a number of competitions under the Personnel Preparation Program. These programs were successful in preparing large numbers of teachers with specific skills and knowledge to work in rural America. At present, special consideration is still given to some personnel preparation proposals which have a rural focus. Some rural locations, however, are so unique that recruitment and retention of qualified teachers remains problematic. One of these areas is the sprawling and extremely remote Navajo Indian reservation.

The Navajo Nation is vast. The reservation is in four states---Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah. Interestingly, another entire Indian reservation (the Hopi Nation) is completely surrounded by Navajo land. Navajo people have their own language, their own customs, and their own laws. Some individuals have suggested that being on the Navajo reservation is as close as one can come to being in a foreign country---without leaving the United States. Travel and communication problems on the Navajo reservation are legendary. Distances between people and services are very great and merely traveling from one place to another, irrespective of distances, can be an adventure. Roads are often poorly maintained and sometimes are washed away by inclement weather. Phone communication may or may not be in service and some small villages are not served by phone lines at all.

Given these issues, it is not surprising that special education teacher recruitment and retention are problems. Teachers unprepared for the realities of life on the "big res" as the Navajo Nation is sometimes referred to are often confronted by incredible professional and personal problems. These problems sometimes include severe professional isolation, professional stress, and a variety of personal stressors such as anxiety and health problems. In a study of the retention of special class teachers on the Navajo reservation, Lancaster (1992) found that "teachers were almost totally unprepared for their work and often left their jobs before fulfilling their first contract" (p. 78). Clearly, special preparation programs for those who plan to work on the Navajo reservation are required. In 1991, several special education faculty at Northern Arizona University met with representatives from schools on the Navajo reservation to discuss personnel matters and to attempt to design one or more programs to prepare teachers for work on the Navajo Nation. Several factors were identified as being critical in the development of a successful teacher preparation program. First, it was decided that the preparation program should be site-

RC 019582

based. Students needed to live on the reservation and be immersed in the culture. Second, the ideal program should involve both local participants (ideally, Native American people) as well as interested students from off the reservation. The thinking was that local participants may be inclined to remain in the area after they had completed their training. However, there was also widespread agreement that too few local persons would be interested in participating in the program to meet the needs of the local schools. Additional persons would have to be prepared if all children and their families were to receive quality service. Finally, it was agreed that participants in such a program would have to be very carefully selected and nurtured. Some teachers left the reservation before their trucks were unpacked. Clearly, we did not want this same thing to happen to teachers being prepared for work on the Navajo Nation. The result of these discusssions was a proposal submitted by Northern Arizona University to the United States Department of Education (USDOE). The proposal, titled The Rural Special Education Project (RSEP), was designed to prepare special education teachers to deliver quality services to Navajo children with handicapping conditions. This $360,000 grant was funded by the USDOE. The authors of the proposal were three professors of special education at Northern Arizona University---Dr. Susan Miller, Dr. Sam Minner, and Dr. Patricia Peterson. Dr. Susan Miller is the Principal Investigator of the RSEP. The RSEP was so successful that another personnel preparation proposal was submitted by the special education faculty at NAU. The proposal, called the Rural Multicultural Training Collaborative (RMTC) is similar in many ways to the RSEP. This project was also written by Drs. Miller, Minner, and Peterson. It was funded in 1993 for $410,000 and is managed by Dr. Patricia Peterson. Both projects are described in this paper.

The Rural Special Education Project

The Rural Special Education Project is a partnership between Northern Arizona University and the Kayenta Unified School District in Kayenta, Arizona. Kayenta is a small town located on the Navajo Reservation. There is one fast-food restaurant, one grocery store, a post office, several gas stations, and one trading post in Kayenta. There is a small hospital operated by Indian Health Services (IHS). There are no banks or movie theatres there. Though quite small, Kayenta is a popular destination for American and foreign tourists due to its proximity to Monument Valley, an incredibly scenic natural area in southern Utah. Many films have been shot in the Monument Valley area and outdoor enthusiasts continue to camp, hike, and photograph the area.

There are two school systems in Kayenta. A small boarding school is operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. A public primary, intermediate, middle, and high school are operated by KUSD. Approximately 89% of all KUSD students are Native American, mostly Navajo and Hopi. The KUSD has modern facilities including an indoor Olympic size pool, several grass playing fields, and a Navajo Cultural Center where students, faculty, and individuals from the community gather to practice Navajo crafts and enroll in informal classes and seminars. The Journal of Navajo Education is published at the Navajo Cultural Center. Northland Pioneer College, a community college serving much of the Navajo reservation, has some facilities on the KUSD campus. The KUSD also owns several large housing compounds ranging from modern townhomes to efficiency apartments.

Eighteen students were selected for the RSEP for the 1992-1993 academic year. The application process entailed three steps---submission of (1) an application detailing each applicant's GPA, background working, living or traveling in highly diverse areas, and other demographic information, (2) a paper explaining why the applicant wanted to participate in the project, and (3) a personal interview. A panel of faculty members selected the students primarily based upon their academic qualities and their motivational level for

entering and completing the project. Nine Navajo persons, one Hopi person, and eight Anglo persons were selected. All but one of the participants were female. All Native American participants were employed by KUSD as teacher aides. After being selected for the project, all participants completed two orientation activities. The first was conducted on the campus of NAU. This two day orientation was conducted by a Native American faculty member and other NAU faculty and staff who had worked on the Navajo reservation. This orientation consisted of an overview of the reservation, an orientation to the varying types of schools on the reservation (e.g., BIA schools, public schools, tribal schools, etc.), an orientation to Navajo customs and culture, and a discussion concerning the advantages and disadvantages of working on the Navajo Nation. Immediately after the on-campus orientation, all participants took part in an orientation planned and managed by KUSD. This orientation consisted of basic information about the school system (e.g., administrative plan, who to call for help, etc.), an overview of the demographics of the student body, and a tour of the physical facilities. The orientation ended with a bus ride to a mesa and fry-bread dinner. After this second orientation was over, the RSEP participants moved to Kayenta where they would live for the entire 1992-1993 academic year.

The Anglo students resided in apartments owned by KUSD. These apartments were adjacent to the KUSD primary school. Each student had a private bedroom furnished with a bed, a desk, a nightstand, and a lamp (all of which came from the NAU Department of Surplus Property). Students shared bathrom, kitchen, and living room facilities. As a contribution to the project, KUSD donated these apartments and the utilities servicing them. The Native American participants resided in their homes in or near Kayenta.

All RSEP participants followed a similar daily schedule. Each Monday through Friday, the Anglo participants were required to work four hours each morning in a KUSD classroom. The KUSD employed a full-inclusion model of service delivery so participants were placed in regular classrooms. All classrooms enrolled one or more handicapped children. During these twenty hours (four hours per day x five days per week), RSEP participants assisted teachers and planned and implemented their own lessons. Their work was supervised by a Project Manager, an NAU faculty member who lived in Kayenta for the entire academic year. Like the RSEP students, this individual resided in an apartment donated by KUSD. The Project Manager was assisted by a doctoral level graduate assistant. Other NAU special edcuation faculty members also assisted with the supervisory responsibilites. The Native American RSEP participants were permitted by KUSD to retain their teacher aide jobs in the mornings. The KUSD continued to pay them for their work. Each afternoon, Monday through Thursday, all RSEP participants attended their teacher preparation classes. Classes were held in a modern classroom which had been made available to the project by KUSD. Classes met from three-four hours per day and followed a well established schedule. Each class started with a brief Navajo language lesson. The Navajo participants functioned as teachers and tutors to the non-Navajo speaking students. Navajo words and phrases were placed on cards and used in conversation. Students charted the number of words and phrases they knew. Next, the daily lesson was presented. These lessons were primarily taught by the RSEP Project Manager though the graduate assistant and faculty from the NAU campus frequently drove to Kayenta for guest lectures. During the fall term, students took classes pertaining to characteristics of handicapping conditions, assessment and evaluation of learning, and behavior management. During the spring term, students took classes in methods of teaching, parental collaboration, and issues in rural special education. In all cases, whatever topic was being discussed was related to the realities RSEP students faced in their classrooms. These "praxis sessions" sometimes took quite a bit of class time. For example, when methods of identifying handicapped children were discussed in class, RSEP students pointed out the inconsistencies between what was being taught and what they had observed in schools. This led into a discussion of non-biased identification approaches, how difficult it was to

accurately identify some minority children, and the variability between state and federal regulations and actual school practices. Many RSEP students agreed that these sessions were the most valuable in their preparation programs.

A variety of support services were made available to RSEP students. Most notably, we employed a cross-cultural counselor to work with students on an individual basis and in small groups. We anticipated that students would experience a variety of professional and personal stressors. Professionally, we felt that students could feel isolated and quite overburdened. The workload associated with being in the KUSD schools twenty hours per week plus attending their NAU classes Monday through Thursday was considerable. We also felt that some students could experience problems interacting with others in their apartments. Students' reactions to discrimination were also thought to be a source of possible stress. The cross-cultural counselor visited Kayenta once per month. She met with each student and typically met with the group of students residing in each apartment. She also provided students with her private phone number and encouraged them to call her if they desired to do so. Finally, each RSEP student was required to maintain a journal. Students were asked to make daily entries, particularly about their reactions to the culture they were experiencing and to their work in KUSD classrooms. Students were told that the journals would be read by the cross-cultural counselor, the Principal Investigator of RSEP, and others designated by the Principal Investigator.

We wanted to insure that all RSEP students fully experienced Navajo culture. We knew of many non-Navajo people who lived on the reservation for many years and never visited the home of a Navajo person, never attended a Navajo ceremony, and never learned about traditional Navajo beliefs and values. To mitigate against this, we asked the Navajo RSEP participants to function as cultural advisors to the non-Navajo participants. These advisors were paid a nominal sum to host students to at least one social event per month (e.g., a family meal, attendance at a lecture or seminar pertaining to Navajo culture, etc.). We also planned several excursions which we hoped would further enrich our students' understanding of Native American culture. The most unique of these excursions was a visit to Supai village, a very small village populated almost exclusively by members of the Havasupai tribe. The Havasupai reservation is located at the very bottom of the western side of the Grand Canyon. It is only accessible by an eight mile (one way) hike, horse, or helicopter. All of the RSEP students made the hike to Supai. There they visited the school, heard a lecture about the history of the tribe, and visited the scenic falls emptying into the Colorado river. The cultural activities RSEP students engaged in Kayenta were many and varied. Students attended a Kachina race, a Navajo puberty ceremony, and a Navajo wedding ceremony. Students attended the Western Navajo Nation fair, hiked throughout Monument Valley, and vsited Canyon de Chelley. Some students herded and sheared sheep and made mutton stew and frybread.

We also encouraged RSEP students to engage in several professional enrichment activities. All students attended and presented papers at the Arizona State Council on Exceptional Children conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Students also attended and delivered presentations at the NAU Honors Week conference.

The Rural Multicultural Training Collaborative

The responses we had from students, our colleagues on the Navajo reservation, and others to RSEP was so positive that we submitted another personnel preparation proposal to the USDOE. Essentially, we took what we learned from RSEP and built upon the strengths of the project to design another program which we called the Rural Mulitcultural Training Collaboartive (RMTC). The purpose of the RMTC is identical to the RSEP (to prepare teachers to deliver qulaity services to Navajo children). However, the RMTC also

prepares teachers to work in Hispanic communites. The authors of this $400,000 project are Drs. Susan Miller, Sam Minner, and Patricia Peterson. Dr. Peterson is the Principal Investigator. The RMTC is a partnership between Northern Arizona University, Greyhills High School in Tuba City, Arizona, and several school districts in extreme southwestern Arizona. The RMTC began in 1993 and will be in operation at least until 1997.

Like the RSEP, traditional students and teacher aides participate in the RMTC. During the fall term, six traditional (Anglo) students worked at Greyhills High School in Tuba City, Arizona for twenty hours per week. Greyhills High School is located on the Navajo Nation in a small town called Tuba City. Tuba City is about seventy-five miles from Flagstaff and is a commercial and cultural center. The traditional students resided in apartments owned by Greyhills High School. As was the case in Kayenta, these apartments were donated to the project at no cost. Nine Navajo teacher aides also particpated in the first year of the RMTC. These persons continued to work at their teacher aide jobs each morning. All RMTC participants attended their NAU classes in the afternoons (Monday through Thursday). Like the RSEP, we employed an on-site Project Manager for the RMTC. This person taught most of the classes in the project and supervised the students' work in the Greyhills classrooms. A cross-cultural counselor was also employed in this project. However, the RMTC differs from the RSEP is one important respect. The RMTC participants are provided with special training pertaining to Hispanic students. At mid-term, the Anglo (hereafter referred to as traditional) RMTC students go as a group to Cuenervaca, Mexico to particpate in the NAU Spanish Immersion Program. There, the students gain approximatley one semester worth of training in Spanish over a three week period. Students live with Mexcian families, attend classes , and complete a daily excursion into a local community to practice their new language skills. After this experience, they travel to Yuma, Arizona where they are placed in schools near the border. Again, students work twenty hours per week in the schools and complete a full complement of NAU classes in the afternoons. The traditional NAU students are joined in Yuma by a contingent of Hispanic teacher aides. These persons continue to hold their teacher aide jobs while completing work toward their degrees in special education. The traditional RMTC students complete their full program in consecutive terms while the Navajo participants complete their programs over two fall terms and the Hispanic participants complete their programs over two spring terms. Another unique attribute of the RMTC pertains to the way courses are delivered to students during the spring term. Though the RMTC Project Manager goes to Yuma with the students and continues to deliver some instruction, some classes are delivered over instructional televison. Northern Arizona University operates a two way microwave link between Yuma and the home campus. This state of the art system provides real time interaction between the sites.

Evaluation of Programs

A comprehensive evaluation of the RSEP was conducted at the end of the first year of the project. Mr. Kevin Brown, a doctoral student at NAU, completed a qualitiative anlaysis of the project focusing on the reactions of students to the cultural experiences they had while in Kayenta. Mr. Brown found that students spent between 645 and 900 hours of time in actual classrooms. Participants engaged in between 18 and 68 cultural activities. An analysis of students' journals revealed that three major themes evolved from journal entries--professional reflections, personal reflections, and cultural impact reflections. Seven-hundred thirty eight comments were made under the profesisonal reflection rubric. Further analysis revealed that two sub-grouping could be subsumed under this rubric---professional reality testing and professional confidence building. Comments made under the professional reality testing sub-rubric pertained to professional activities which appeared to be inconsistent with concepts learned in NAU classes. One participant suggested:

"Full-inclusion is not working. We learned that this was a good and innovative idea in class, but the reality of what goes on in real classrooms is very bad."

Nine-hundred seven comments were made under the personal reflection rubric. These comments pertained to how participants reacted to their lives in the Kayenta apartments and their personal interactions with their fellow students. Most of these comments (n=289) were of a positive valence. One student stated:

"I can't believe that we're out of here in less than a month. I have become very close to everyone here. We've gone through so much together. I know I will miss everybody terribly."

Two-hundred thirty comments were made by students about cultural matters. Most all of these comments were positive. Thirty-eight of them, however, were not. One student stated:

"The Navajo people talk about their connection to the earth, but they throw their trash everywhere. This place is a mess. I don't think they are connected to the earth at all."

We are presently conducting an evaluation of the RMTC, but preliminary data looks positive. Teachers, students, and administrators affiliated with the project have commented upon the wonderful cultural and professional experiences our students appear to be receiving.

Conclusions

Preparing well qualified special education teachers for service in rural and remote areas is a difficult job. Preparing such teachers for service to American Indian children is an even more difficult thing to do. We are convinced that the best way to do this is to provide students with the opportunity to live and work in the very settings we hope they will be in after graduation. Students in these settings need much support and such programs are not without risks. However, we feel that the RSEP and the RMTC are good models of personnel preparation for special education teachers. We hope to revise these programs, perhaps expand them, and continue them well into the next century.

References

Helge, D. (1984). The state of the art in rural special education. Exceptional Children, 50, 294-305.

Lancaster, L. (1992). The recruitment and retention of special edcuation teachers on the Navajo Indian reservation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona.